DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 382 324 PS 023 082

AUTHOR Stanberry, J. Phillip; Stanberry, Anne M.
TITLE Confidence in Parenting: Is Parent Education Working?
PUB DATE 15 Apr 94
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Early Childhood Association (45th, New Orleans, LA, April 11-16, 1994).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; Adult Education; *Adults; Parent Attitudes; *Parent Education; Parenting Skills; *Personal Autonomy; Self Concept; *Self Esteem
IDENTIFIERS *Individuation

ABSTRACT

This study examined parents' feelings of confidence in their parenting ability among 56 individuals enrolled in 5 parent education programs in Mississippi, hypothesizing that there would be significant correlations between personal authority in the family system and a parent's confidence in performing the various roles of parenting. Based on several measures of parental functioning and confidence, the study found a correlation between individuation and parenting confidence. The results suggest that parent education programs need to stress personal competence as well as parenting education. Program activities should also promote individuation and self-definition in family-of-origin and family-of-procreation, identify and build on family strengths, identify and develop family resources, help parents establish permeable boundaries with their family-of-origin and family of procreation, and guide parents to realize the changes necessary as they and their children grow through the family and individual life cycles. (MDM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 382 324

Confidence in Parenting:

Is Parent Education Working?

J. Philip Stanberry, Ph.D.

Anne M. Stanberry, Ph.D., CHE, CFLE

School of Home Economics

University of Southern Mississippi

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Philip Stanberry
Anne M. Stanberry

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

A research paper presented at the

Southern Early Childhood Association annual meeting

New Orleans, LA

April 15, 1994

PS 023082

Confidence in meeting the child's emotional and social developmental needs is a major factor in parents' feelings of competence as a parent (Siegal, Mesagno, & Christ, 1990; Siegal, Raveis, Bettes, Mesagno, Christ, & Weinstein, 1990). The purpose of our research was to determine the feelings of confidence in parenting for a sample of persons enrolled in diverse parent education programs in Mississippi and to identify possible correlations between their confidence and their personal authority within the family system.

Setting

Our subjects came from two Displaced Homemaker's programs in three counties, a Head Start parent education program for fathers, and two adolescent pregnancy programs housed within schools in two cities in Mississippi.

Demographics

Our subjects ranged in age from 13 to 48 with a median age of 28.5 years. A stem and leaf plot shows the ages more graphically. Ten subjects were men and 46 were women. The ethnic backgrounds included 32 persons who were African American, 2 who were American Indian, one who was Hispanic American, and 21 who were Causasion.

Of the 56 subjects, 17 were married; 10 had been divorced for 1 to 10 years. The 10 divorced parents and 29 never married subjects

had been single parents for an average of 4.13 years with a range of 1 to 15 years. The children of our subjects ranged in age from newborn to 22. Two subjects had grandchildren living in the home. Eighteen mothers had their own mothers living in the home and 5 had their fathers living with them.

In addition, 18 subjects had other extended family members living in the home and one subject had a couple and their two children under 2 years of age living with them. The number of household members ranged from 2 to 11 with a mean of 4.34 persons per household.

Hypothesis

Our hypothesis is that there are significant correlations between personal authority in the family system and a parent's confidence in performing the various roles of parenting.

Families of origin are important to the parenting process because it is from them that we learn our internal working models of who we are and how to interact (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1977; Crain, 1992; Mayseless, 1991; Schneider, 1991). For example, if we feel we must "ask mother" because we are not competent to make a decision or must ask her so we won't hurt her feelings, we have an internal working model as one who must ask permission from the parent or who is always trying to please the parent. If we avoid asking for help because we expect to be rebuffed by the parent,

then we may miss out on some helpful information. If, on the other hand, we know that our parents will "be there" if we have a problem and that parents want us to, and feel confident that we can, make decisions, we will approach life's problems with confidence (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1977; Bretherton, 1985).

The important aspect of parenting with personal authority is that parents can make up their own minds, after listening to advice or wishes from the family of origin. When parents can make up their own minds as to what is right and best for themselves and their children without feeling intimidated by significant others, then they possess personal authority within their family system (Stanberry & Stanberry, 1992; Williamson, 1991).

Role of Parent Education

We believe that parent education must address the needs of the whole parent within their life context. Parenting skills training is important but it is only a part of what is needed. Parents come to the parenting process with their own sets of developmental histories, personal relationships, interactional patterns, influences from the environment, and values and attitudes from families of origin as well as from society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1985).

Children also come into the family with ther own developmental

histories, personal relationships, interactional patterns, influences from the environment, and values and attitudes from their families of origin as well as from society.

Our assumption, based on a body of clinical literature, is that parental confidence is correlated with parenting abilities (Garmezy, 1983; Siegel, Mesagno, & Christ, 1990; Siegal et al., 1990). Systemic thinking takes seriously the notion of circular causality (Bowen, 1978; Friedman, 1991; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). That is, there is a parallelism between the way parents feel about themselves and the way they parent. If parents feel good about themselves and their capabilities as persons, they will feel good about their capabilities as parents.

Therefore, our post-test only design study looked at the correlation between parental functioning and the parents' ability to exercise personal authority, to make their own decisions, within their own family of origin system.

We measured parental functioning, meaning the parents' abilities to perform parenting activities as well as establish and maintain the parent-child relationship. For this, we used the Global Parenting Confidence Measure, designed by Dr. Karolynn Siegal and her associates at the Memorial-Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. This instrument was designed to measure parents' perceived confidence in

their abilities to meet their childrens' emotional and social developmental needs (Siegel, Mesagno, & Christ, 1990).

Insert Table 2 about here

The six subscales of parental functioning measured were comfort/openness, sensitivity/reassurance, promoting self-esteem/independence, support/trust, setting standards/discipline, and global confidence in parenting.

We also used the Personal Authority in the Family System Questionnaire (PAFS-Q) to measure important relationships in the three generational family system. Subscales measured the parents' perception of spousal fusion/individuation and intimacy; intergenerational fusion/individuation, intimacy, intimidation, and triangulation; nuclear family triangulation; and personal authority in the family system (Bray, Williamson, & Malone, 1984).

Insert Table 3 about here

Considering our data as a whole composed of interdependent parts (that is, the subscales), it seems plausible that our subjects are, in the main, tringulated, fused, and not individuated. Triangled, fused, and undifferentiated persons have immense difficulty in establishing appropriate interpersonal boundaries. This characteristic shows itself in the data with moderate correlations between the Personal Authority in the Family System subscales of individuation and Global Parenting Confidence Measure parenting styles subscales --openness, support, trust building, and standards for behavior.

Insert Table 4 about here

Clinical research has previously indicated that persons in triangled and fused relationships experience moderate to high levels of stress and anxiety, have more physical illness and relationships of poorer quality (Harvey & Bray, 1991; Harvey, Curry, & Bray, 1991). In general, these persons often have low thresholds of anger and frustration and may lose control more readily when stress and anxiety escalate. Many of these persons will expend their energy in an attempt to control their environment and will fail to control themselves.

Discussion

We must be careful in making conclusions and generalizing them. We used the Pearson Product Moment Correlation for analysis and it is sensitive to sample size. We did reach moderate correlations with several of the factors which indicate that parenting programs that help parents to gain control of their lives will help them to feel more competent as parents. As they feel more competent in their parental role, their interaction with children will enrich family life.

A correlation between individuation and parenting confidence suggests a rationale for offering parent education programs which are outside the traditional, needs/skill based programming realm. It seems to us that the best way to help persons who are represented by our sample is to empower them to increase competence in family-of-origin and other interpersonal relationships. In addition, the correlations suggest family-of-origin work for marital and family therapists as they work with families in which parenting issues are a major part of the family's dysfunction.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are to:

* Provide parent education programs that stress personal competence as well as parenting skills training.

* Provide program activities that promote individuation and self-definition in family-of-origin and family-of-procreation through:

    personal goals development
    personal needs awareness
    personal connectedness to family members
    restructuring role in family-of-origin

* Identify and build on family strengths

* Identify and develop family resources

* Help parents establish permeable boundaries with their family-of-origin, family-of-procreation, extended family, social agencies, etc.

* Guide parents to realize the changes necessary as they and their children grow through the family/individual life cycles

Conclusions

The results of this study are important to us as child and family professionals because parent education is one key to the future stability of our society. The interaction between parent and child makes a difference in how the child receives from and responds to the world. When parents can learn to interact with their children in healthy ways, dysfunctional family patterns can be changed. Children today are the parents of tommorrow; stopping symptomatic cycles is necessary if we expect to have a secure future.

References

Ainsworth, M. D. (1979). Infant-mother attachment. *American Psychologist, 34*(10), 932-937.

Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice*. New York: Aronson.

Bowlby, J. (1977). The making and breaking of affectional bonds. *British Journal of Psychiatry, 130*, 201-210.

Bray, J., Williamson, D., & Malone, P. (1984). *Personal Authority in the Family System Questionnaire Manual*. Houston: Houston Family Institute.

Bretherton, I. (1985). Attachment theory: Retrospect and prospect. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 50*, 3-35.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1985). The parent/child relationship and our changing society. In L. Arnold (Ed.), *Parents, children and change* (pp. 45-57). Washington, DC: Heath.

Crain, W. (1992). *Theories of development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Friedman, E. (1991). Bowen theory and therapy. In A. S. Gurman & D. P. Kniskern (Eds.), *Handbook of family therapy* (II, pp. 134-170). New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Garmezy, N. (1983). Stressors of childhood. In N. Garmezy & M. Rutter (Eds.), *Stress, coping and development in children* (pp. 43-83). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Harvey, D., & Bray, J. (1991, March). Evaluation of an intergenerational theory of personal determinants of psychosocial and health distress. *Journal of Family Psychology*, pp. 298-325.

Harvey, D., Curry, C., & Bray, J. (1991). Individualization and intimacy in intergeneralizational relationships and health: Patterns across two generations. *Journal of Family Psychology, 5*(2), 204-236.

Kerr, M., & Bowen, M. (1988). *Family evaluation*. New York: Norton.

Mayseless, O. (1991). Adult attachment patterns and courtship violence. *Family Relations*, *40*, 21-28.

Schneider, E. L. (1991). Attachment theory and research. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, *19*(3), 251-266.

Siegel, K., Raveis, V., Bettes, B., Mesagno, F., Christ, G., & Weinstein, L. (1990). Perceptions of parental competence while facing the death of a spouse. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, pp. 567-576.

Siegel, K., Mesagno, F., & Christ, G. (1990). A prevention program for bereaved children. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, pp. 168-175.

Stanberry, A. M., & Stanberry, J. P. (1992). An intergenerational perspective on differentiation. In N. B. Leidenfrost (Eds.), *Families in transition* (pp. 61-65). Upper Marlboro, MD: International Federation for Home Economics.

Williamson, D.S. (1991). *The intimacy paradox*. New York: Guilford.

Table 1

Age

1	3 4 4 4 4 5 5 5 5 5 6 6 7 7 7 7 7 7
2	2 4 5 5 6 6 7 7 8 8 9 9 9 9
3	0 0 0 1 1 1 3 4 5 5 5 5 5 6 6
4	1 1 1 2 5 6 6 7 8

N= 56

Table 2

Global Parenting Confidence Measure

Scale	Mean	Range	SD	T Score
Comfort/Openness	84.15	33.2 - 99.9	15.19	49.99
Sensitivity/Reassurance	83.36	26.6 - 99.9	17.74	51.13
Self-esteem/Independence	85.17	30.0 - 99.9	17.39	53.34
Support/Trust	84.93	34.3 - 99.9	15.08	51.68
Standards/Discipline	79.02	30.5 - 9.9	17.40	48.43
Global	80.46	35.0 - 98.7	14.83	48.39

N = 53

Table 3

Personal Authority in the Family System

Scale	Mean	Range	SD	T Score
Spousal Intimacy	38.8	11-55	13.12	49.48
Nuclear Family Triangulation	36.0	21-50	7.19	50.02
Spousal Fusion/ Individuation	64.0	45-86	9.49	37.67
Intergenerational Intimacy	88.9	29-118	19.42	48.52
Intergenerational Fusion/Individuation	28.3	17-38	5.34	37.13
Intergenerational Triangulation	35.5	12-52	9.47	42.40
Intergenerational Intimidation	98.6	37-142	27.68	31.91
Personal Authority in the Family System	40.9	24-61	8.93	41.14

N = 37

Table 4

GPCM	PAFS	CORRELATION
Comfort/openness	Spousal Intimacy	.3609 (33, p=.018)
Standards/ Discipline	Spousal Intimacy	.3288 (33, p=.029)
Standards/ Discipline	Intergenera-tional intimacy	.3340 (33, p=.027)
Promoting Self Esteem	Intergenera-tional fusion/ Individuation	.3364 (33, p=.026)
Support/Trust	Personal Authority	.4193 (33, p=.007)
Global Confidence	Personal Authority	.3023 (33, p=.041)